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ABSTRACT

These parent resource materials address seven topics of concern to parents of preschool, elementary school, and adolescent children. The first brochure offers tips on choosing child care, discussing in-home, family, center, and infant-toddler care. A checklist is included for assessing day care programs, caregivers, and environments. The second brochure offers advice on communication between home and school, communication at home, talking with teachers, and community involvement. The third brochure provides suggestions intended to help families follow through on sharing the responsibility of household tasks. Related materials, such as charts of household tasks, are included along with a learning activity for husbands and wives which is designed to increase awareness of family patterns of task allotment. The fourth brochure, "For Fathers Only," describes characteristics of infants for new and expectant fathers, and offers advice about adjusting to parenthood and getting involved in the care of the child. Twelve guidelines for fatherhood are presented. The three concluding brochures focus on stress, pointing out how parents, caregivers, and teachers can help children cope with stress, and indicating ways of managing teenage stress. Discussions concern the nature of stress, children's response to stress, and what to do if suicide is threatened. (RH)

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Choosing Child Care

GAIL R. CARLSON, *Ph.D.*
CHILD & FAMILY DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST

The type of care and treatment your child receives in his her early years and the opportunities that exist for him her influence the kind of adult he she will become. The care your child receives also influences your life. If your child is in a program where he does not receive the kind of care that is needed, he will probably be cranky and hard to live with when he comes home.

Good child care includes three things:

A caregiver who provides your child with loving care and agreed upon guidance. He she also works with you and your family to make sure your child grows and learns in the best way possible.

A setting that keeps your child safe and healthy. Equipment including games, toys, and furniture should be in good repair and appropriate for your child's age and level of development. The number of children in your child's group should be small enough to allow your child to receive individual attention.

Activities suited to your child's stage of growth and that help him develop mentally, physically, socially and emotionally. Activities should encourage but not force creativity, curiosity, and learning.

Types of Child Care

Child care can be good for children if it provides the warmth, supervision and individual attention your child needs. Consider these factors when selecting among in-home care, family daycare and center-based care.

In-Home Care

In this situation, the caregiver comes to or lives in your home. This could be a relative, friend or paid employee. You may want to use in-home care for a handicapped or disabled child needing special attention, for an infant or toddler, or for night-time and after school hours.

While in-home care may be more convenient, it is generally more costly. This is especially true if you need someone full time or if you only have one or two children. For families with three or more children, in-home care can be the least expensive type of care.

The caregiver who works in your home on a regular basis may be entitled to be paid minimum wage. Social Security Tax must also be paid for these child care providers. Check with the Internal Revenue Service to see what type of worker is eligible for minimum wage and social security. You must file a report and send a check every three months to the Internal Revenue Service.

Family Daycare

This type of care is provided in the caregiver's home. Frequently the provider is a mother with children of her own. It could be a friend, relative, neighbor, or someone you don't already know. Usually only a few children are cared for at any one time. Family daycare can be a good arrangement if you have an infant or very young child, want a more home-like atmosphere for your child, or have a school-age child needing only before- or after-school care. In many rural areas family daycare is more likely to be available than center care.

Missouri has licensed and unlicensed daycare homes. If someone is caring for more than four unrelated children, the home must be licensed. If licensed and the provider is caring for six children or less, three can be under the age of two. When seven to ten children are being cared for, two can be under the age of two. However, if the provider has an assistant, four children can be less than two years of age. Since in a daycare home a provider could be caring for several unrelated children plus her own or relatives' children, parents must make sure that the child will be receiving enough individual attention. An unlicensed home arrangement also places more responsibility on the parent to check on its health and safety standards. Your child can receive quality care in a family daycare home. Get to know your provider and take time to check out the setting and activities.

Daycare Center

There are many different kinds of daycare centers—nursery schools, preschools, parent cooperatives, etc. In all of these settings children are cared for in a group for all or part of the day. Some centers are set up mainly to keep children safe and secure. Many centers have an organized program of activities designed to help children learn.

You may be interested in center-based care if: you plan to keep your child in the same setting several years, your child needs special care because of a physical or mental handicap or an emotional problem, or you want certain educational activities. In selecting a center check out the facilities, the qualifications of the staff, and the number of children cared for by each caregiver (Child/Staff Ratio). Keep in mind your child's individual interests and abilities. Not all children are comfortable in large groups, some may need a more "home-like" atmosphere than can be provided in most centers.

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In Missouri, there has been an increase in the number of unlicensed centers. As with unlicensed homes, parents have more responsibility for checking out health and safety standards, activities and educational programs and the child/staff ratio in order to insure individualized attention and quality care.

Before deciding on a day care program visit several facilities. You can obtain a list of licensed centers and homes from the social services agency in your community. Also check with your employer to find out if they have a referral list of centers and home-based programs. Visit the center or home with your child, when other children are present. Spend some time (a half-hour to an hour) watching and listening to what is happening in the room or area where your child will be working and playing. Use the checklist provided in this guidesheet in talking with the director.

Infant-Toddler Care

Today, many parents need child care for their infants and toddlers. This type of care is in demand and not always easy to find. If you have an infant or toddler you have some special things to consider. A setting is a good place for an infant or toddler if:

-There are adult caregivers who like taking care of babies and who smile often and talk to the babies as they play with them, dress them, or feed them.

-There are adult caregivers who show friendly helpfulness to children learning to feed themselves or be toilet trained.

-There are enough adults so that babies are played with and cuddled and toddlers are allowed to "practice" some new skills.

-The furniture and equipment (cribs, high chairs, playpens, toys) are clean and attractive and there are interesting and safe things to look at, reach for and play with during the day.

-Babies are shifted frequently to new positions, new outlooks, new toys and sometimes are left alone for privacy and quiet.

-The caregivers wash their hands carefully after diapering, dressing, and feeding the babies; the adults are careful that bottles, cups, spoons, and toys are not mixed-up among the babies.

-The infants and toddlers are clean, dry and comfortable and hear gentle voices, cheerful sounds and receive lots of praise.

A Child Care Checklist

The following list of questions is designed to help you decide what child care factors are important to you and your family. Not everything listed may apply to your needs. Circle the items which are important to you and then check yes or no as you find out the answers. The more questions answered with a "yes" the more likely the program will meet your needs. If you have an infant or toddler there is an additional section of items to consider at the end of the checklist.

CHILD CARE CHECKLIST

Center or Home _____ **Name of Person** _____

Training of This Person _____ **Address** _____

_____ **Phone** _____

Caregiver

	Y	N
Appears warm and friendly?	___	___
Seems gentle and kind?	___	___
Is someone with whom I can develop a relaxed and sharing relationship?	___	___
Has childrearing attitudes and methods similar to my own?	___	___
Feels good about herself and the job?	___	___
Understands what children can and want to do at different stages of growth?	___	___
Talks and listens to each child?	___	___
Encourages children to express themselves with words?	___	___
Seem to have enough time to look after all the children?	___	___
Helps children to feel good about themselves through giving praise and attention?	___	___
Helps children get along with others and respect other people?	___	___
Provides routines and rules which children can understand?	___	___
Accepts and respects your family values?	___	___
Takes time to discuss your child with you?	___	___
Encourages good health habits?	___	___

Settings

Is this place required to be licensed?	___	___
If so, have you seen the license?	___	___
Do you feel comfortable in the place?	___	___
Do you feel welcome?	___	___
Are the children happy and relaxed?	___	___
Do the children seem to trust the adults?	___	___
Is there enough space?	___	___
Does the space seem safe?	___	___
Is outdoor equipment varied, sturdy and safe?	___	___
Can children get inside and outside safely?	___	___
Is the bathroom clean and safe?	___	___
Are chemicals, knives, guns stored safely?	___	___
Is the kitchen safe?	___	___
Is there a quiet place for naps?	___	___
Are there enough cots for all the children?	___	___
Is there provision for an ill child?	___	___
Are meals nutritious and tasty?	___	___
Can the children move around?	___	___
Are furniture and equipment appropriate for the ages of children in care?	___	___
Is children's work displayed?	___	___
Do I like how children behave?	___	___
Would my child fit in with this group?	___	___
Would my child make friends here?	___	___
Do the children get along here?	___	___
Do children and adults interact easily?	___	___
Is the place clean and comfortable looking?	___	___
Is there a safety plan to follow in emergencies?	___	___
Is it practiced with the children?	___	___
Is the location convenient?	___	___
Can I afford the cost?	___	___

Activities

	Y	N
Do the children enjoy what they are doing?	___	___
Is learning appropriate for my child's age?	___	___
Is there a variety of books, toys, etc.?	___	___
Can the children pursue their own interests?	___	___
Is the space arranged for easy learning?	___	___
Is there a planned program?	___	___
Is the television off or used selectively?	___	___
Are rest and play balanced?	___	___
Are the children read to?	___	___
Are children expected to pick-up?	___	___
Are imagination and creativity encouraged?	___	___
Are special trips and events planned?	___	___
Are there opportunities for older children to practice skills?	___	___
Do they have time to do homework?	___	___
Can they use community facilities—swimming pool, baseball field, a recreation center?	___	___

Added items for parents of infants and toddlers

Caregiver

Seems to enjoy cuddling your baby?	___	___
Cares for your baby's physical needs such as feeding and diapering?	___	___
Spends time holding, playing with, talking to your baby?	___	___
Provides stimulation by pointing out things to look at, touch and listen to?	___	___
Provides dependable and consistent care so your baby can form an attachment and feel important?	___	___
Cooperates with your efforts in regard to toilet training and self-feeding?	___	___
"Child-proofs" the setting so toddlers can crawl or walk safely and freely?	___	___
Helps toddlers learn to do things by themselves (feeding, dressing, and toileting)?	___	___

Setting

There are gates at the top and bottom of stairs?	___	___
A potty chair or special toilet seat is provided in the bathroom?	___	___
There is a clean and safe place to change diapers?	___	___
Cribs have firm mattresses and are covered with a heavy plastic?	___	___
There are separate crib sheets for each baby in care?	___	___

Activities

Children can crawl and explore safely?	___	___
Children can play with objects that encourage the development of the senses of touch, sight and hearing mobiles, mirrors, cradle gyms, nesting cups, boxes)?	___	___
Toddlers can take part in a variety of activities that are suited to their short attention spans (puzzles, cars, books, outdoor play)?	___	___

Making the Decision

The choice of a child care program is important to you and your child. The peace of mind you get from knowing that you've made the best possible arrangement will more than compensate for a little extra cost or extra driving. The program which is the easiest on your pocketbook may not always be the program which is best for your child.

You and your daycare provider are both working parents, and share similar frustrations and challenges of juggling multiple roles. A cooperative and satisfying arrangement will make life easier for both of you and your children. Here are some suggestions:

-Expect a contract and or written set of policies. Understand and honor its provisions. If you plan to hire someone to work in your home you might want to provide a contract which includes a trial or probationary period.

-Pick up your child on time. If an emergency prevents this, CALL.

-Pay for the time you contracted for. Even if your child was not there, your provider was. Determine fees ahead of time—when they are due and what you do about sick days, vacations, and emergencies.

-Understand how and why your provider disciplines. Discuss how and why you discipline. If problems arise, discuss them openly with the provider and try to work out your differences.

-Talk regularly with your provider about your child and his her progress. Be sure to tell her if the child is tired, sick, or concerned about something. Call during nap-time to avoid talking about the child in front of him or her.

-Be sure your child is being served nutritious meals.

-Prepare your child by talking about the day care setting—what they can expect to do, when you will come for them, if they will be taking naps and eating at the center or home. Try to spend some time in the home or center with your child.

-Notify Family Services or the Health Department of any child care situation where children are "at risk" of abuse or neglect.

Resources

"**A Parent's Guide To Day Care**", DHHS Publication No. (OHDS) 80-30254, March, 1980.

"Choosing Child Care" Super Shopper Lesson, Phyllis Pirner-Missouri Cooperative Extension Service, 1981.

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GETTING INVOLVED

Home-School Communication

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State Child & Family Development Specialist

Parents have the major responsibility for their children's growth and development. As children grow older and become involved in activities outside the home, parents begin to share this task with others including Sunday school teachers, daycare providers, the dance or swimming instructor and the child's schoolteacher. As a result, parents need to become more involved in their children's out-of-home experiences.

Children six years of age and older spend more time in school than any other setting outside the home. Becoming involved in your child's school life is critical to development. There are a number of ways parents can make school experiences more positive for their children. One of the most important is communication—communication at home, at school and in the community.

Communication at Home

At home, communication means talking with your child and listening carefully as well. Children enjoy telling parents about the school day. Help your child develop the habit of showing you artwork and assignments. Take time to review school papers with your child and let him/her know you are pleased with improvement. This will help your child develop self-confidence and reinforce an interest in learning.

The amount of detail children will share varies with age. Older children, beginning about age 10, usually are not willing to say too much about what is happening, but they still need to hear Mom or Dad ask: "How did your day go?"; "Was hot lunch any better today?"; or "What did Mr. Johnson have to say about your report?"

A child also needs to hear about your day and when younger brothers and sisters are at home, their activities as well. Talking about these daily happenings will help your child realize that his/her place in the family is secure in spite of being away from home all day. When less worried about home, a child is more likely to focus attention on school.

Communication at home also means talking about feelings. Children returning to school may be concerned about a new teacher or new classmates. Some children worry about keeping up with required classwork. Even children who have done well in the past may worry about meeting the expectations of a new teacher. Parents have concerns as well. They may be worried about their child's adjustment or the influence of other adults or children on their child's behavior and development. Not all feelings are negative. A child also needs the chance to tell you about the fantastic play made during a recess ball game or how great it feels to do well on a test.

A ground rule for everyone to remember is that whether positive or negative, the individual has a right to his or her own feelings. For example, a parent might say, "I can understand, it takes time to figure out what your new teacher expects of you. Give yourself a little more time. You have done well in the past. If in a week or so, you still are worried maybe we can figure out what to do together." This is very different from saying, "Oh you should not feel that way, you are such a good student." There is no one best way of saying things. Trying out new ideas makes them more comfortable and more useful to you.

Communication in the home not only helps the family deal with daily happenings, but also lays some groundwork for the future. If your child thinks of you as someone who cares, and is

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willing to talk and listen, he she is more likely to come to you for help when making important decisions.

Talking with Teachers

Communication at home is only one way to help children make a positive adjustment to school. You can also help by talking with teachers. Your child is more likely to have a good experience outside the home if you and the teacher are working together to provide enriching experiences that promote growth and development. Find out what the teacher requires and help your child meet those demands. Also share your expectations with the teacher and encourage him/her to keep you informed of your child's progress.

Talk to the teacher about classroom materials and how they are used. Read and review the materials yourself. Let your child's teacher know that you are interested in what is happening. The school needs to hear from you not only when there are problems and you are dissatisfied but also when you are generally satisfied or pleased with your child's education. Teachers are more likely to take your complaints seriously if they know you are interested enough to also tell them when they are doing a satisfactory job. If your schedule permits, volunteer in the classroom or with an occasional project if you can't volunteer regularly. Become involved with your school PTO, PTA, or PTSA or help set up such a group if none exists.

Talk with your child's teacher when you drop the child off or pick him/her up from school. If your child rides the bus or you do not routinely go to the school, phone calls and notes exchanged between you and the teacher can help keep you informed and keep you in contact with the teacher. For example you might write notes like these:

Dear Mr. Smith:

We had some excitement last night and Ann was up late. Her cat had kittens. If she does not pay attention as well as she usually does it may be because she is a little tired. Also she is excited about the litter.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Lift

or

Dear Mrs. Jones:

I just thought I would let you know how excited Jimmy was about the new math game. He taught the whole family how to play. Thank you for making learning so exciting for my son.

Yours truly,
Mrs. Tom

Community Involvement

A third way you can help make your child's school experience positive is through communication in the community. In part, this means becoming more involved in politics. Though politics may seem far removed from a positive school experience, by becoming informed and sharing your ideas with those making decisions about school policies, you are actually helping to improve your child's life. You are not just reacting to what others do to you and your child but helping to create changes. Children need parents who will protect their rights to quality education.

This does not have to take a lot of time. Find out about new laws by checking your newspaper, going to your library or school board offices, and by asking your school principal to help you get the information. Once you have decided how you feel about a proposed law, write or call your lawmakers. A lawmaker should be aware of the attitudes of parents and others in the area he serves. They need to know your point of view before they vote.

On a local level, attend school board meetings and keep in contact with board members and school officials. Make positive suggestions. If you like what your child's school is doing, say so. If you are not satisfied with what is happening try to work with the teachers, principal and school board to correct the problem. If a situation arises that affects your child's total class or school, work together with other parents and school administrators to prevent or solve the situation. This kind of parent power can have benefits for you and your children.

The job of preparing our children for an uncertain future is too big a task for either parents or the schools alone. Administrators, teachers, and parents must work together. We are all responsible and have much to gain from a partnership. The schools need support from their constituents, especially now with failing bond issues, escalating costs, and renewed demands for quality education. Parents need to know they can count on the schools to help them prepare children to successfully manage in a highly technological society.

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THE DEATH OF SUPERMOM

OR

WE ALL LIVE IN THIS MESS TOGETHER

GAIL R. CARLSON, *Ph.D.*
CHILD & FAMILY DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST

"We all live in this mess together," reads a sign posted on a friend's refrigerator door. It is a friendly reminder that since everyone lives in the house, it should not be just mother's responsibility to keep the place clean, liveable, and presentable.

Here are some suggestions that may help families follow through on sharing the responsibility of household tasks.

1. Develop a work plan. List chores that must be done both inside and outside of the home. Be as specific as possible, for example: cut grass, pull weeds, wash dishes, sweep kitchen floor, etc. Ask your family to look over the list and add chores that were forgotten. Decide which jobs must be done daily, weekly, monthly. Also decide if there are some tasks being done more often than they really need to, and how they will be handled in the future.
2. Call a family meeting and decide who will do what. Let individuals select the jobs they will do. Some may have to be assigned because no one wants to do them.

   Do not divide jobs into male and female tasks. Family members need to learn a variety of household management skills. Occasionally switch chores, especially those no one wants to do. Even adults get bored doing the same things all the time.

   Determine when certain jobs will be done—before breakfast, after school, on Saturdays. Set time limits, for example, "meal clean up will be done within 45 minutes of finishing a meal." Children should have some say in when and how quickly they will do their tasks.
3. Keep records of who does what and when. A simple chart posted where the whole family can see it may help. A parent can be assigned the task of checking off completed chores. This gives the parent the opportunity to inspect the quality of the work (if she/he chooses), to compliment the child on what has been done, or to show the child how to do something differently if necessary.

4. Show your children what you want done, and give them time to learn the skills. Do not expect perfection. There are many jobs that parents could do easier, quicker, and more thoroughly by themselves. When they do, children lose out on some valuable on-the-job training. Remember, even though you have done the task "a thousand times," your children need your help and direction when they tackle a job that is new to them.
5. Children need to know the positive and negative consequences of their actions. Family values and goals will determine what the consequences will be. Some parents believe children should be paid or rewarded for doing household tasks. Other parents feel that learning cooperation, participation, and responsibility are values in themselves. Still others believe that "you can't love doing everything" and there are some tasks that need to be done because they benefit everyone or because everyone enjoys the end-product, in this case, a clean house.
6. Make sure that everyone in the family has time for fun and to pursue interests of their own. Taking time for oneself is equally important for you and your children. Basic reasons for sharing tasks are to give the whole family more time to share together and to give all family members more time to accomplish individual goals.

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Example

The Weekly Reminder

For the Week of _____

To-Do List	Meetings/Activities	Meal Planning	Shopping
A. Take clothes to cleaners - mom	-Oct. 5 10:00 mom at school	Thursday— Pork Chops	Catsup - at Tom's market
B. Dusting this week - Mary	-Oct. 8 4:00 Dentist Dad	Friday - Tacos Tom start Saturday A.M. Take Chicken out of freezer. Mary	Need paper plates Napkins
C. Make bed - Tom	-Choir practice Wednesday - Mary 6:00 P.M.		

1. To-Do List

A. Those chores or tasks not done routinely and who is to do them.

B. Change in tasks - reminder when someone different is to start a task.

C. Reminder when someone repeatedly forgets a routine task.

2. Meetings/Activities

A. List everyone's activities and meetings—include those from monthly calendar.

B. Put down dentist or doctor appointments.

C. Make everyone responsible for adding their own activities.

3. Meal Planning

A. What meal is planned.

B. Who will start or prepare it.

C. Reminder to take food out of freezer.

4. Shopping

A. Mark down specials and where they are.

B. Keep track of staples or items you need.

Household Tasks

Example

Tasks	Who	How Often	Time
Kitchen and Dining Room			
Prepare supper			
Set table			
Clear table			
Wash dishes (Load DW)			
Dry dishes & put away			
Wash off table			
Wash off counters			
Clean cabinets			
Sweep floor			
Mop floor			
Living Room/Family Room			
Pick up belongings			
Straighten tables			
Throw out old magazines			
Pick up & stack old newspapers			
Dust furniture			
Vacuum floors			
Bathrooms			
Scrub out tub			
Scrub out sink			
Clean toilet			
Wash floor			
Laundry			
Sort clothes			
Wash clothes			
Dry clothes			
Fold clothes			
Iron clothes			
Other			
Wash windows			
Clean out garage			
Collect trash			
Pay bills			
File taxes			
Plan social activities			
Select Christmas gifts			
Change diapers			
Bathe children			
Discipline children			
Outside Work			
Wash car(s)			
Sweep walk & drive			
Clip around flower beds			
Pull weeds from flower beds			
Water flowers & trees			
Water lawn			
Cut grass			
Rake leaves			
Put out trash			

THAT'S YOUR JOB!

A Husband - Wife Learning Activity

In many families, jobs are divided into male and female tasks. What is it like in your family? Decide who does each task and check the appropriate column. You and your partner may want to do this together or do it separately and compare answers. Decide what changes if any you want to make in your job assignments. Everyone needs to learn how to do a variety of tasks. If you or your partner should become ill or for some other reason, one of you would have to do tasks normally done by the other, it helps to know what is involved. Besides, doing the same job all the time is boring, even for adults. Every family is different. What works in one family may not work in yours. Talk it over and decide what's best for your family.

Task	Female	Male	Take Turns	Together
1. writing checks				
2. filing taxes				
3. washing dishes				
4. cleaning house				
5. laundry				
6. carrying out trash				
7. grocery shopping				
8. preparing meals				
9. mowing grass				
10. driving (when both are in car)				
11. washing car				
12. changing flat tire				
13. deciding on social activities				
14. selecting Christmas gifts				
15. choosing home furnishings				
16. changing diapers				
17. bathing children				
18. disciplining children				

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For Fathers Only

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For most men, fatherhood is a major milestone. It can be as important to a man's future as his choice of career. Many men no longer consider child care to be strictly women's work and are taking a more active role in this daily task. Fathers soon realize, that, despite the hard work, they have much to offer—love, security, comfort. They also gain much from the relationship in terms of emotional fulfillment and satisfaction.

What to Expect

If you are a new or expectant father, here are some things you might want to consider.

Don't be too shocked by the way your newborn looks. Many babies seen on television or in magazines are two to three months old. Newborns are very different in appearance. They are red and wrinkled with puffy faces. Also, they have long lumpy heads with smoky colored eyes. A newborn's head frequently looks too big for its body and the eyes are typically the most noticeable feature. Fuzzy prenatal hair, which drops off in a few days, frequently covers the newborn's body and an oily covering, which helps guard against infection, dries and peels off naturally. This gives the baby a scaly appearance for a short time.

In spite of his her appearance, your newborn can see, hear, and smell, and is sensitive to pain and touch. The only sense that may not function well is taste. Much of your child's activity during the first few weeks of life is focused on adapting to a new environment outside mother's body. This involves crying, babbling, and thrashing about in order to attract attention and get his/her needs met. Your response to your child's behavior greatly influences its future development. Don't be afraid to answer your baby's calls for attention, you can't spoil him with too much love.

At first, babies have irregular and unpredictable schedules and they may want to be fed, held or changed when you want to sleep. Many new parents complain that all they have to do is pull a chair out from under the table for dinner and a sleeping baby will wake up. This period won't last forever and with your help the baby will develop a schedule and sleep through the night.

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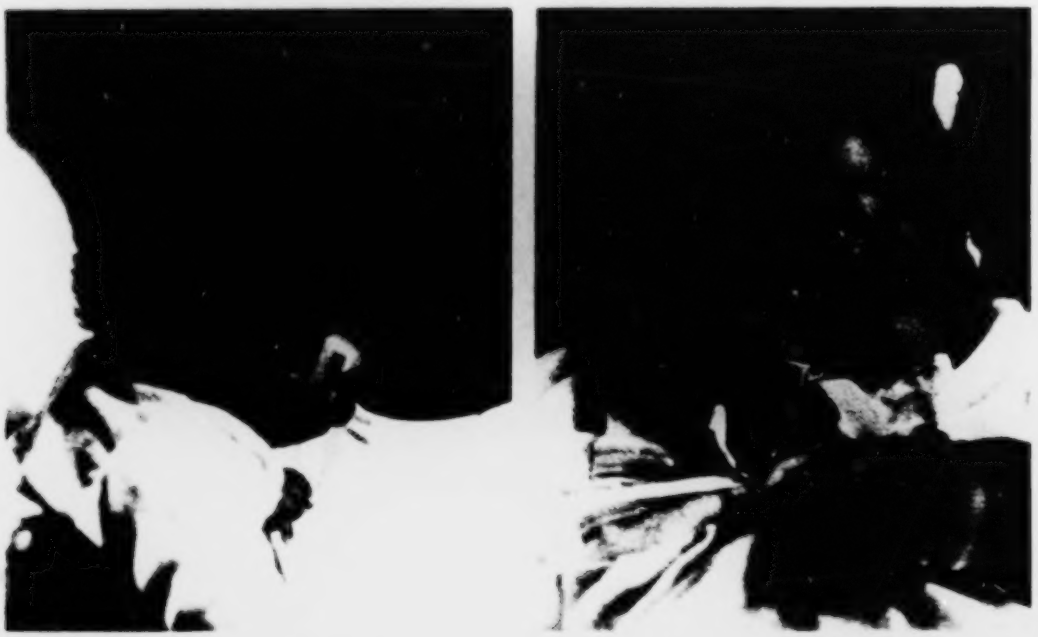


At this age your baby is constantly changing. Everything is a new experience. They are breathing air for the first time. They have never worn a diaper before. Until birth they have never been touched by a human hand. Teething, rolling over, using a cup, and standing are all firsts for your child. Think of the feelings involved—fear, pain, pleasure, excitement, a sense of accomplishment when a new skill is learned. How would you feel or react if things were constantly changing and you did not know what to expect next? Remember, your baby is not trying to upset you or make you angry, he she is calling out for your help in the only way that he she knows.

Adjusting To Parenthood Takes Time

A common complaint of many new fathers is feeling abandoned or neglected. Some feel resentful and jealous or think of the baby as a rival, much like a child would when faced with a new brother or sister. Meeting your baby's needs will take a lot of time—time that you and your wife shared together. If you feel tired and resentful, you are not alone and there is no need to feel guilty. You will probably find that you have mixed feelings just as your wife does. New mothers are often easily excited. One minute they seem overjoyed and the next they are feeling discouraged, anxious or even jealous. Some of these mood swings are the result of hormonal changes occurring after birth. Others, however, come from increased responsibility and uncertainty about being able to parent and from overwork, increased anxiety, lack of sleep and their own feelings of resentment.

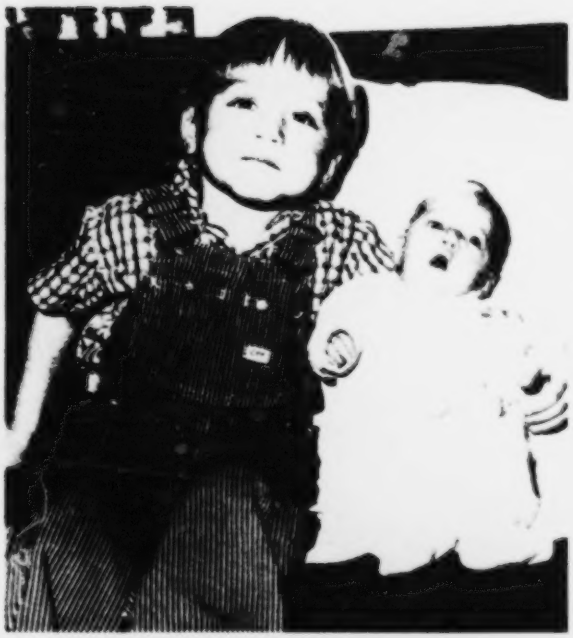
Do yourself and your wife a favor! Find a good baby-sitter, one you both trust, and do things you enjoy doing. At first plan brief outings—grocery shopping, a walk, a short ride in the car. Easing into activities will help you deal with the anxiety of leaving baby at home. Tackle dinner or a show together after the baby gets a little older and you feel more confident about your parenting.

If your wife was working before the baby was born, feelings of resentment and anger are real possibilities, especially if she enjoyed the job and was good at it. Men who take an active role in childrearing frequently find themselves with these same feelings. While your roles as parents are important, it can be frustrating. The job of parenting tends not to be highly valued in our society.

Talk over your feelings with your wife. An important ingredient to successful parenting is communication. You both need to discuss your ideas, feelings and expectations if you want to maintain a smoothly running family. Work out problems as they arise and avoid competition. Remember that adjusting to parenthood takes time.

Getting Involved—Sharing in your baby's care

If you take an active part in caring for your infant it is important to realize that this will limit the time you have available. The more time and effort you put into raising your child, the less time and energy you have for other things. Nurturing is a tremendously important task. Your child needs both you and his her mother. By working together, both you and your wife can develop a sense of belonging, and mom, dad



and baby can grow closer together.

There are a number of other reasons for becoming involved in your child's care. A growing child needs both male and female adults to serve as models. For most children, the father is the primary male model. By being with and caring for your child, you show him her what an adult male is like. This will help the child see that there are two loving adults in his immediate family.

Since your child thinks in terms of concrete things—that is, things he she can see and feel—you can play an important role by playing with, caring for and talking to the child. This includes diapering, feeding and bathing. It also involves comforting your little one when he she is ill or upset and holding, snuggling and cuddling him her. For the first few months you and your wife will be doing many of the same tasks, but it is through these daily activities that your baby learns about love, trust, and you.

There is another more practical reason for sharing the caretaking responsibility. Often when father takes care of baby, mother is around to assist and often supervise. However, if mom needs to go out or suddenly becomes ill, you may have to care for the baby on your own. If you have assumed responsibility from the start and had a lot of practice, these situations pose less of a problem.

Many fathers also find that being involved in the baby's care helps them deal with negative feelings, if they have any. Remember, mixed feelings are common. The more time you spend together as father and child, the more your baby will respond to you and the greater your sense of joy and excitement will be as you help your child grow.

Guidelines for Fatherhood

Relax and enjoy your child. Parenting is not always easy, but it has many benefits both for you and your child. Avoid being too hard on yourself. There is no such thing as the perfect father. There are no established rules to follow, however, there are some guidelines that can help you. Guidelines are principles that not only help you decide how to carry out specific tasks like feeding, bathing, diapering, teaching skills, etc. Following are some parenting guidelines. You may have others.

1. **LOVE:** I am glad you are my child. Whether you are good or bad, I still love you.
2. **TRUST:** You can count on me. I may change my mind from time to time but generally you know what to expect from me.
3. **GUIDANCE:** I will set boundaries and limits on what you can do to keep you safe and help you learn what is acceptable and appropriate. I will help you learn to become self-disciplined and responsible.
4. **TEACH:** Even though I have done something 1,000 times, I will remember you need me to show you how to do things correctly and need time to practice while I watch to make sure you are doing them right.
5. **ENCOURAGEMENT:** I will give you opportunities to try new things and time to practice new skills. I will be there to comfort you when failure occurs and then nudge you on to try again.
6. **COMMUNICATION:** I will tell you what I think and feel. I will share ideas with you. I will look directly at you, get down on the floor or pick you up so we can look into each others eyes. I will not only try to understand your words but also how you feel and what you are trying to tell me.
7. **PATIENCE:** When I can, I will give you the 15 minutes you need to practice buttoning your shirt or the hour you want to watch the ants at work. I'll try not to get angry even though I have untied the knot in your shoe 10 times in the last 2 hours.
8. **TIME:** We will spend time together as a family. We will find things to do that everyone can take part in.
9. **VALUES:** I will teach you my values. We will talk about what I feel is proper behavior. I will teach you table manners and politeness. We will even talk about money. How much to save and what to spend it on.
10. **ATTEND:** I will take time for myself to build a good relationship with my partner. I will be better able to take care of you if my own needs have

been met and if my partner and I feel good about each other.

11. **LEARN:** I will learn as much as I can about human growth and development so that I do not make unrealistic demands on you and so that I know when to encourage you to try harder.
12. **OBSERVE:** I will watch you. I will learn your unique ways of dealing with the world and make sure that in spite of occasional slips backward you are generally progressing as you should in your development.

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CHILDREN AND STRESS

Parents Helping Children Cope

Gail Carlson, Ph.D., Child and Family Development Specialist

Children Under Stress

Children will encounter some stress during their early years, regardless of how protective parents may be. Not all of it is unhealthy, a certain amount is needed to help children develop into mature responsible adults. Any time a child is expected to learn something new or change a behavior, stress is likely to result. Rather than protecting children from these situations, parents need to help them learn how to cope with them. Common stressful events include: going to school or daycare for the first time; the birth of a brother or sister; illness or death in the family; a move to a different neighborhood or city; parents' divorce or separation; or a parent's loss of a job.

While these periodic occurrences can take their toll on some children, stress is also caused by day-to-day events in the family and at school. David Elkind suggests that children are stressed when given too much responsibility or information, when expected to deal with too many changes, and when overloaded emotionally. Under such conditions, chronic stress can occur and as with adults, can interfere with the child's health and quality of life.

Children's Response to Stress

Stress responses in children are very individualized. When adults observe the behavior of children closely, they quickly learn to recognize the signs. A parent can find out a great deal by listening to a child's conversations with friends or other adults. Listening and observing children at play with toys and pets is also very revealing. Some signals a parent can watch for include a change in appetite, sleeplessness, vomiting, paleness, or complaints of headaches, stomachaches or nausea. Parents can also look for some of the following changes in behavior:

- Regressive behaviors like thumbsucking, nailbiting, bedwetting, or nightmares;
- Loss of interest in activities the child normally enjoys;
- Loss of motivation, poor school performance, inability to concentrate, truancy;
- Use of drugs and/or alcohol;
- Irritability, uncharacteristic withdrawal or dependency, depression or apathy, loss of friends;
- Increased hostility and aggression, including rough or cruel treatment of pets or other animals, increased fighting with other children, sullenness or increased anger toward parents.

The appearance of one of these behaviors, especially if it is short-lived, is probably no cause for great concern. However, do look for sources of stress and be prepared to help your child deal with these situations if the behavior: 1) continues over a period of time; 2) interferes with normal growth and development in other areas; and 3) is accompanied by other noticeable changes in behavior.

How Can Parents Help?

For children, an important buffer against stress is a healthy parent-child relationship. Growing up in a car-

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ing family provides the child with the security, consistency, respect, and honesty he she needs :o become a confident and independent person. As a parent, you can show your chilren you care by:

- Spending time alone with them each day. Sometimes they just need you to be there.
- Communicating with your children. Talk with them. Describe and explain. For example, "This is what you can expect." "This is what will happen." "This is what we will do." Just as important, listen to what your child has to say. Listen for the message in the words, and watch for the feeling behind them.
- Touching your child physically and emotionally—a kiss, a hug, a smile—means a lot.

Along with creating a caring relationship, parents can help children cope with stress in other ways.

- Provide your child with a sense of security. Set guidelines for behavior, develop a comfortable daily schedule and help your child find socially acceptable ways of dealing with negative feelings.
- Be realistic in terms of what you expect from your child. Are your expectations for behavior in line with your child's age and abilities? Expecting too much or too little can create a stressful situation.
- Provide your child with opportunities to be successful. Success is important in building a positive self-concept and a feeling of self-worth. A child who feels good about himself herself can more easily deal with stress.
- Teach your child how to relax. Play is nature's way of dealing with stress. Children learn better, work better and are healthier when given time for play and self-expression.
- Teach your child how to make decisions and solve problems. Parents can help the development of these skills by giving children choices along with opportunity and time to solve their problems.

Most of the time, the parent's efforts will be enough to carry the child through a stressful event. However, if the situation also affects the parent, or if the parent is unable to cope with the child's reaction, seeking outside help is a good idea. Sometimes all the child needs is a friendly adult (a minister or family friend) to talk things over with. At other times the professional help of a physician, counselor, or psychiatrist is needed. Knowing your own limitations and using existing resources is a sign of strength and the most effective way of helping your child.

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CHILDREN AND STRESS

Caregivers and Teachers
Helping Children Cope

Gail Carlson, Ph.D., Child and Family Development Specialist

Children will encounter some stress during their early years, not all of which is unhealthy. A certain amount is needed to help children develop into mature responsible adults. Any time a child is expected to learn something new or change a behavior, stress is likely to result. Rather than protecting children from these situations, parents, as well as other caring adults, need to help them learn how to cope with them. Common stressful events include: going to day-care, preschool, or school for the first time, fights or arguments with friends, trouble accomplishing tasks, difficulties with a teacher or caregiver; a move to a new home or town; parents' divorce or separation, or a parent's loss of a job.

While these periodic occurrences can take their toll on some children, stress is also caused by day-to-day events in the family and at the center/school. David Elkind indicates that children are stressed any time they are given too much responsibility or information, when expected to deal with too many changes, and when overloaded emotionally. Under such conditions, chronic stress can occur, and as with adults, can interfere with the child's health and quality of life.

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Children's Response to Stress

Stress responses in children are very individualized. When adults observe the behavior of children closely, they quickly learn to recognize the signs. A teacher or caregiver can find out a great deal by listening to a child's conversations with other children. Watching and listening to a child at play with toys is also very revealing.

Some signs of stress to look for include, a change in appetite, sleeplessness, vomiting, paleness, complaints of headaches, stomachaches or nausea. Also, watch for some of the following changes:

- Regressive behaviors like thumbsucking, nailbiting, bedwetting, or nightmares;
- Loss of interest in activities the child normally enjoys;
- Loss of motivation, poor school performance, inability to concentrate, truancy;
- Irritability, uncharacteristic withdrawal or dependency, depression or apathy, or loss of friends;
- Increased hostility and aggression, increased fighting with other children, increased hostility toward teachers or caregivers.

The appearance of one of these behaviors, especially, if it is short-lived, is probably no cause for great concern. However, do look for sources of stress and be prepared to help the child deal with the situations if the behavior: 1) continues over a period of time, 2) interferes with normal growth and development, and 3) marks the occurrence of other noticeable changes in behavior at about the same time.

Helping the Child Cope

If you are a day-care provider or teacher, there are a number of ways you can help the preschooler and early school-age child. Whether the source of stress is at the center/school or home, day-care providers and teachers can be valuable resources for the total family.

These are some specific ways you can help:

- Develop a caring relationship with the child. If you are a home provider with a limited number of children, spend time alone with each child every day. In larger centers or schools, the child needs to know there is at least one adult who can be counted on. Assistants should be assigned groups of children. Be flexible—if a child is particularly attached to a teacher or assistant, encourage that relationship.
- Provide the child with opportunities to express positive and negative feelings by: encouraging indoor and outdoor play, talking with the child one-to-one, encouraging storytelling, and providing opportunities to work with clay, finger paints, wood and punching bags.

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- Provide a child with a sense of security. When possible, permit children to help make the rules they will live with. This will help children more easily understand, accept, and feel comfortable with them. Children also feel more comfortable with consistent expectations for behavior. Regular staff conferences and visits with parents help provide consistency and continuity.
- Encourage feelings of self-worth. Emphasize the child's strengths, not his/her weaknesses. Show appreciation when the child assumes responsibility. Give children tasks they can accomplish successfully and give genuine praise for tasks well done. Pay attention to each child as an individual and call each one by name.
- Be flexible. A schedule can help bring order into a child's life. However, a rigid one that does not allow for completion of tasks—important from the child's point of view—can cause stress. Warn children ahead of time so they can bring activities to a close. When extra time is needed alter the schedule a little.

While day-care providers and teachers can help the stressed child directly, they can also be of indirect aid. At times, an event will be stressful for the parents as well as the child. Providers and teachers can help by:

- Being aware of parents' feelings and giving them an opportunity to express them, if they choose to;
- Visiting in the child's home, if invited;
- Providing parents with information concerning signs of stress in the child. If parents are distressed, they may not realize the child is also upset.
- Providing information about community resources, if asked.

By working together, parents and caregivers/teachers can reduce the amount of stress faced by children. Encourage parents to become more involved. Consistency in rules and expectations is important for the child. In order to insure this, caregivers/teachers need to talk with parents regularly. They need to jointly plan the child's day.

Involvement with the center/school should start even before the child enrolls. Parents and children should be encouraged to visit. Parents also should be encouraged to stay with the child until he/she has adjusted to the new environment. Separation from parents is one of the major causes of stress in children. Gradual separation is healthier for the child and less stressful for all concerned.

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Managing Teenage Stress

Gail Carlson, Ph.D., State Child & Family Development Specialist

Growing up is never easy and the teen years are generally known to be difficult and complex. Adolescents have always faced a number of physical, emotional and developmental changes—increased awareness of their rapidly changing bodies, a fragile self-esteem that is easily lost, the struggle with sexuality, the search for identity and individuality which is often done on a trial and error basis and at times is viewed as rebellion. Developmental changes like these have caused stress in youth for generations. Factors beyond their control also add to these pressures, resulting in even higher levels of stress. Some of these are increased divorce rates, remarriage of parents and step family relationships, increased physical and sexual abuse, drug and alcohol abuse by parents, and contradictory and conflicting information coming from too many teachers—parents and other adults, peers, and mass media, like television, and records. Not only are these stressful for teens, but they also make it more difficult for them to get the support needed to cope with developmental changes and daily hassles.

What is Stress?

As used here, stress refers to a general physiological and psychological reaction to anything that threatens a person's well-being or survival. It is our body's response to the demands placed on it. Stress is a normal part of growing up and a certain amount of stress is beneficial. It can motivate a young person to complete an assignment, do well at sports, and get along with friends. The concern is with stress overload, or distress, which results when a teen is burdened with too much information or responsibility, expected to deal with too many changes, or is overloaded emotionally. Such conditions can interfere with the teen's health and quality of life.

Young people can respond to stress by becoming angry and rebellious, withdrawn and uncommunicative or by thinking through the problem and finding a solution. Aggression and anger get attention, but in the long run cause trouble. Withdrawal can also be destructive. It is normal to want to be left alone when things don't go well. However, if it goes on too long, teens feel no one cares. In either case they become cutoff from the caring, understanding and help they need. The third option involves finding constructive ways to deal with tension created by the stressful situation—talking with trusted others and learning to manage stressful situations in order to minimize their negative effects.

While most young people weather the adolescent years without undue stress, many respond to stress overload by becoming withdrawn and depressed. Depression is now recognized as a widespread problem among American adolescents. Reliable figures concerning the incidence of adolescent depression are difficult to obtain but it has been estimated that 30% to 40% experience levels of depression ranging from mild to severe. Depression is closely correlated with suicide, the third leading cause of death among youth 15 to 24 years of age. Between 60 and 70 teens a day commit suicide. Since 1960, the suicide rates among youth 10-14 and 15-19 have more than doubled. Further, it is estimated that for every teen suicide victim, there are 100 other unsuccessful attempts. This high number in part reflects the impulsive nature of teens but also indicates their willingness to use suicide as a means of communication or a cry for help.

Mental health professionals are also concerned about adolescents who mask their depression with low school achievement, school phobia, drug and alcohol abuse, anorexia nervosa, sexual promiscuity

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and delinquency. These self-destructive behaviors are increasingly being viewed as warning signs of depression and stress overload.

Teens respond to stress overload in very individualized ways. The difference between normal adolescent rebellion and serious depression is based on time, degree, and amount of deviation from the youth's usual personality and behavior. A sudden change of behavior, totally out of character for the individual, which continues over several weeks or months, or a number of behavioral changes appearing at about the same time, suggest the need for immediate intervention. Some signs of stress and depression include:

- Avoiding friends, activities, school and social events;
- Inability to think of anything but the problem;
- Unexpected outbursts of anger or crying;
- Sleeplessness, exhaustion, irritability;
- Anorectic or bulimic behavior, complaints of stomachaches.
- Escaping by sleeping or daydreaming all the time
- Unusual neglect of personal appearance.

Helping Teens Manage Stress

Attitude is a major factor in how successfully individuals deal with stress. To an important degree, we create our feelings - by how we perceive and interpret our experiences or circumstances. As adults, we can help teens most by helping them build a positive attitude about themselves and their ability to adapt to stressful situations. Self-esteem is on the line most of the time and its loss is a major source of depression. Help young people recognize their own strengths and abilities, provide them with meaningful tasks they can accomplish and praise them for those well done. Involve them in volunteer activities, permit expression of opinion and emotions—positive and negative—avoid blame and criticism, and be courteous. Let the young person know you have faith in his or her ability to deal with the situation. Providing false reassurance is not very helpful. In all probability things will be all right but helping youth recognize they have the ability to solve the problems gives them a greater sense of control and power needed to deal with future situations. Teens who feel in control and who have stress management skills are in a better position to avoid stress overload. Following are some specific ways you can help.

- Understand developmental changes in adolescence and help teens cope with them. Some of these changes are: accepting one's changing body and learning to use it responsibly and effectively; achieving emotional independence from parents and other adults; preparing for economic independence and/or marriage and family life; and developing intellectual and social interaction skills. Mastering these and other developmental tasks can strengthen a young person's sense of self-esteem and provide a base for dealing with unexpected or traumatic stressors.
- Tune into stressors in your teen's life and to changes in behavior that may indicate stress overload. We all feel "bummed out" at times. Things usually get better. Sometimes that is hard to remember when you are low. It is especially hard for teens because this is the first time they face some of the problems and don't have the resources or experience to manage them. Teen problems are as important to them as yours are to you. It is important to judge the severity of the problem by the teens' perception of its impact rather than by your adult standards. Discounting, minimizing, or underestimating the significance of young people's problems can further weaken an already sagging self-esteem, cut off communication, and limit your ability to help. The earlier in the distress the young

person can be helped the more likely you can prevent depression and suicide.

- Be there to "just" listen. Teens don't always need advice. They need someone to hear what they have to say. It is important to have someone who is aware of the stress, hurt feelings, worries, and difficult decisions. Non-judgmental responses like, "You're upset, let's talk about it"; or "I am here if you want to talk some more," can provide the young person with the support needed to manage the situation.
- Help the young person increase decision-making and problem solving skills. Help them define the problem, explore the alternatives and consequences, and select the best response. Give them time to carry out their course of action and help them decide if the plan is working or if they need to select another option. Teens' idealism and high expectation frequently lead to some degree of negative thinking and self-talk. Teens need help looking at situations realistically. Questions like the following might be helpful.
    - What have you lost or what do you fear losing?
    - What are you afraid of, what are the threats for you in this situation?
    - How much change is going on in your life? What can you avoid or control while you are trying to deal with the most difficult?
    - Do you feel you are falling short of someone's ideal? Whose?
    - How much responsibility do you have for what has happened to you?
    - What role do you have in shaping your feelings and reactions?

- Involve other people. A caring friend can do much to ease the emotional distress that comes with worry, disappointment, and conflict in life.

Peer contact is important but difficult. Distressed young people might not be much fun to be around. Yet they need other teens and routine activities in order to feel good about themselves and to put their situation into proper perspective. Peer counselors or a few supportive teens who will invite them to go along to a movie or some other activity they enjoy can do much to help a distressed teen. If the situation does not improve or you feel you cannot provide the young person with the time and support that is needed, seek professional help. Offering to go with the youth or maintaining contact with the individual during this time is also very helpful.

If Suicide is Threatened

With severely depressed teens, suicide is always a possibility. Take all threats seriously, and don't try to bluff the teenager in an attempt to talk him/her out of the act. If danger is imminent, call the police. Never promise to keep suicide threats or thoughts a secret. Be honest, let the young person know you need to talk to someone else. Usually, when they know what the limits are, it won't interfere with your ability to communicate with them. It also becomes easier to involve others when necessary. Risk getting involved - trust your instincts. If you feel the person is thinking about suicide, get them to talk about it. Open communication is a very useful strategy for preventing teen suicide, not only with the potential victim but with the general teen population. Keeping suicide a secret only makes it more glamorous and exciting. Let teens know the facts, debunk the myths and help them face problems and crises realistically. Open communication is particularly important in a community affected by a teen suicide. This event frequently leads to other suicides because in effect, a peer has condoned the action and made it acceptable. The problem is heightened when the teen suicide victim gets a lot of

special attention and concern. Young people need to see all sides of the situation, not just the glamour and pathos often presented to sell a story.

Summary

Young people have pressure and stress in their lives. Many have the skills and support of caring families or friends to cope with the situation. Others however, if unable to cope adequately, become depressed. Mild to moderate depression is a healthy reaction to life situations as long as it does not last too long. Teens need help recognizing there is nothing strange or terrible about how they feel. They don't need to be ashamed or afraid of feeling depressed at times. However, if the reaction seems out of proportion to its cause, if depression lasts beyond a couple of weeks or is very intense, if the person seems to have given up hope, or especially, has threatened self-harm, it is urgent that professional help be arranged.

Open communication, a caring listener, goal setting and decision making skills, opportunities to relax and play are some stress management techniques needed by our youth. Such activities not only reduce teenage depression and suicide but provide our young people with skills useful for preventing stress overload throughout their lives.

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